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Editorial

THE RELIGION OF THE COLLEGE STUDENT

Within the next month thousands of young men and young women will enter the colleges and universities of the country, and thousands more will resume their studies after a summer's vacation. For practically all these students the period of their residence in college will be not only one of acquisition of knowledge or of preparation for a profession, but also one of great significance for their religious life. In these few years they will pass from the religion of childhood into that of comparative maturity. Truths which have so far been to them merely lifeless traditions will now begin to be matters of vital interest. Each individual student will believe himself a discoverer in a new world. Alone, and for the most part unaided, each one will work out a readjustment of his inner life which shall be in harmony with the demands of this new, larger and more real world of duties and opportunities.

The religious ideas which these young people have brought with them to college will be subjected to a process of examination and criticism, and the result of this process will have an important influence in determining the convictions which they will thereafter hold, and the attitude which they will maintain to the institutions of religion. Moreover, the path which these take who are now passing through the period of their education will go far to determine the course of thousands more who will be influenced by them. It is a matter of the highest importance for the cause of religion and for the welfare of the country what sort of influence the colleges of the land are preparing to exert upon their students.

What opportunities are the colleges offering to their students

for instruction in the fundamental facts of the Christian religion? What help is being given them in order to insure such a readjustment of faith as will henceforth command the respect and confidence of the students who have made it?

In no small measure the colleges owe their existence to the influence exerted by Christianity. In the midst of the institutions of this religion, and in an atmosphere in no small part created by it, most of their students are to live their lives. Is it not as obligatory upon the colleges to give to their students an opportunity to acquire some real knowledge of the origin, history, and principles of that religion, as to do a similar service in respect to their country? How many colleges are doing this, and doing it adequately? Some, undoubtedly. Many, we fear, are not, and among the latter are some that owe their existence most directly to the Christian church.

But it is not enough that the college should offer instruction in the subject of religion. It is no less important that such instruction should be adapted to those to whom it is offered. There is no occasion to exaggerate the difference between the college student and the rest of the community. The boy that goes to college is not necessarily brighter or abler than his brother who enters the manufactory or the counting-room. Still less is he certain to be wiser than the father and mother to whose self-sacrifice he owes his educational opportunities. But it remains true that the great business of the college is to teach young men and women to think, and to act rationally, instead of following impulse or tradition. Moreover, the habit of thinking once acquired is apt to extend itself to all phases and aspects of life. These things must be taken into consideration in the determination of the kind of instruction that shall be offered to college students in the field of religion, and when taken into consideration they demand that such instruction shall be for substance scholarly, and for spirit frank and open-minded.

If religion has fallen into discredit today with intelligent men and women, one of the chief reasons is that Christian teachers, instead of fearlessly facing facts and frankly answering questions, have too often "hedged and trimmed," both in private and in the

classroom. A real student wants the truth; he has a right to it. We can never have the highest type of Christianity until young people are set free in the presence of Fact and Truth. Love of truth and inbred reverence will be their sufficient safeguard in the moment of enlarging vision. God is behind all his truth. Let the student learn this great fact and he is forever free to investigate, and no field need be held exempt lest its weaknesses be uncovered. The freer the investigation, the stronger the resultant faith.

The protest that is often uttered against intruding upon the attention of the people questions concerning religion calculated to disturb their minds and unsettle their faith has a certain basis of justification. Life is not scholarship. It is but one of the many instruments by which life is enriched. But this protest has its very definite limits as respects the student. He is, indeed, as yet of relatively immature mind. He still has much of the mere acquisition of fact to achieve. For research in any advanced form he is as yet unprepared. Yet the spirit of investigation is in the atmosphere. The ultimate appeal in all the classrooms of the college is to facts, not to the opinions of authorities. It is in the last degree inexpedient, not to say impossible, to create a different atmosphere and employ a different method in the teaching of the Bible and religion. The principle of adaptation just as much requires that the teaching of these subjects to students shall be in the true sense scholarly as that the street preacher shall put his message simply and directly without overmuch refinement or reasoning.

But again, it is not enough that the colleges offer to their students opportunities for instruction in religion and ethics. Knowledge alone makes no man good, and opportunities offered do not always signify opportunities seized. The colleges have, in effect, invited parents to intrust students to their care. It is true that these students are not children and cannot be treated as such. Manhood and womanhood are not developed by excess of watch-care. Nevertheless it remains that many college students are still in a formative period of life, and the colleges themselves are morally bound to take account of the moral welfare of the student

body as of its intellectual development. Strict classroom requirements have themselves a moral value, but they require to be supplemented by agencies and influences more immediately concerned with the presentation of high ideals of life and the development of noble character. The ideal situation exists when members of the faculty feel and voluntarily show a purely unofficial and friendly interest in the students individually. But when such interest is for any reason lacking or inadequate, the college is bound to see to it that the lack is made good in some other way. The student who goes through the four years of his college course without having found in the faculty some friend to give him timely and wise counsel on the problems which are certain to confront him has missed something that he has a right to expect from his college.

There is probably today no place in which a young man will, on the whole, be subject to influences more calculated to make of him a man of broad outlook, liberal views, and strong character than the college. But there yet remains much to be done, both in the direction of instruction and in the creation of atmosphere and influences conducive to these ends. Forward must still be the watchword of all those institutions which assume the responsibility of training those who are to be pre-eminently the educated men and women of today.